

Interview: Dr. Maged George â?? Chairman, Export Council of Medical Industries, Egypt



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â??Egypt: the golden gate to Africaâ?• â?? The head of the export council of medical industries reviews the remaining obstacles on the way to double the value of Egyptian exports until 2018, and explains his vision of an African Union with Egypt positioned at its center.

Could you please give us a brief introduction of the Export Council of Medical Industries and explain its current goals and ambitions?

As Export Council of Medical industries (ECMI), we are responsible to promote the export activities of four industries: the pharmaceutical industry, the cosmetic industry, the medical appliances industry and the veterinary products industry. All four sectors combined represent roughly 550 members, of which not all are exporters yet however are within our scope as they potentially engage in export activities. We push horizontally by supporting the further establishment of exporters and manufacturers in these industries and vertically through activities that aim at increasing their overall turnover.

Currently we are building a long term strategy for the council, which sets an overall target to reach until 2030, split in five individual milestones to accomplish for each individual board as our internal legislative period is three years. This ensures an overall direction and a clear target to focus on for each new council and clearly communicates our targets and ambitions for our members. Our current target until 2018 is to double the current export value of roughly EGP 4.5 billion (USD 560 million).

Your members come from very similar, yet different industries. How do you coordinate the different challenges and help the individual member to overcome them?

We consider the EIMC to have the characteristics of a Holding Company; our responsibility is not to focus on individual concerns but to focus on strategies that concern the common benefits for all these sectors. We communicate an individual direction to each sector which subsequently contributes to the overall strategy. This process solves individual challenges as the synergy created overcomes common obstacles and thus enables the individual member to further promote their business. In order to realize the full potential of this organization, we structure our members not by industries but by what type of client they are; separating multinationals from locals for example. Each sector or team has a leader which communicates with the other leaders in workshops, consolidates the common concerns and develop a strategy which benefits all of our clients.

What are the necessary key milestones in achieving the ambitious target of doubling the value of Egyptian exports within the next three years?

The private sector has all the necessary conditions established to further expand Egyptian export activities; we need the public sector to act accordingly. For the export activities to flourish, we need a re-coordination of all Egyptian ministries that currently exert influence on Egyptian exports and mandate full jurisdiction to one centralized governmental body. Currently, multiple ministries focus on issues that are their responsibility from the micro-perspective, not realizing the impact that certain decisions have on the macro environment for Egyptian exports. Thousands of Egyptian businesses have the potential to export, and an established ministry of exports could fine-tune the opportunities and realize this tremendous potential!

Such a ministry could easily stop paralyzing Egyptian export activities, it could encourage, educate and support smaller businesses upon engaging in exporting, it could even further tie bonds with the other African countries with a special earmark to export activities, it could identify specific key markets and proactively promote Egypt in these, it could create necessary logistic centers, and most importantly would turn Egypt into the trade and export hub of Africa!

How do you assess the role your members in the pharmaceutical sector will play in the future development of the Egyptian economy?

The increase of exports in the pharmaceutical sector will directly impact the growth of the Egyptian economy, as the profits made can be reinvested in Egypt and because these industries are labor intensive. Current pharmaceutical exports are limited due to the regulation of drug pricing in Egypt as it mitigates the attractiveness of pharmaceutical exports out of Egypt. Our regulatory authorities must understand how valuable pharmaceutical exporting could be for Egypt, how significant the economic development of Egypt would benefit and realize that domestic companies would always find efficient pricing solutions for the Egyptian patient.

One of the sectors you serve is the cosmetics industry, which has been relatively successful in export markets; how can the Egyptian pharmaceutical industry learn from the success of the cosmetics industry?

In terms of creating synergy there are ways to collaborate. Firstly, rather than individually entering a market and creating individual brand awareness, different industries need to unite their investment efforts and enter markets in collaboration, in order to establish an overall consumer awareness for Egyptian products and thus shape the perception of "Made in Egypt". Currently we see major opportunities arising in East, South and West Africa which we focus on to realize. Secondly, domestic collaboration will greatly enhance the realization of the Egyptian export potential. For this purpose we are currently promoting the construction of the Egyptian Logistics Center over Africa project, which will help all Egyptian businesses to enhance their marketing activities into Africa.

What is your vision for Egypt's future?

Egypt is at the heart of Africa looking to promote high quality products and services. I would like to see a copy of the European Union in Africa—the African Union! Egypt could have the leading position in realizing this dream and set the standards for the whole regulatory framework that then controls this immense market. Intellectual property rights, drug registration and much more could be unified whilst creating common borders and custom controls thus creating the biggest market in the world. This would create tremendous synergies and immensely bring all the African countries forward. In Egypt we have the necessary infrastructure and educated workforce to be the starting point of an African Union, and I would like to see Egypt as exactly that—the golden gate to Africa!

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